**Cloverdale Township Volunteer Fire Department**

The Cloverdale Township Volunteer Fire Department was officially formed in 1949 by a small group of local men. The need for a fire department was seen as something that was long overdue in the town of Cloverdale and in the surrounding areas, but like many fire departments started during the 1940s and 1950s, funding was a major issue. While the actual department was organized and started in 1949, records as far back as 1884 prove that there were dedicated volunteers who came out during fire events to try to extinguish blazes that were out of control. A large 1884 fire in downtown Cloverdale prompted an informal bucket brigade to organize on the spot. The local volunteers managed to stop the fire from burning down the entire downtown district—only a hardware store was lost.

After the 1884 fire, local men decided that a bucket brigade should be used anytime a fire was reported in town. They did not call themselves a fire department and they had no formal training, but they would come with their buckets and try to save what they could. At some point, the town did upgrade from buckets to actual fire hoses that could be hooked into cisterns and hydrants in town. If a fire was reported, volunteers would come and get hoses stored in the town building, hooking them directly to hydrants in town to extinguish the blaze. With no pumps to boost it, water pressure was a big problem, but the system provided adequate flow to contain a big fire from getting out of control.

On September 9, 1941, a large fire broke out at the Methodist Church in town. What the locals called the volunteer firefighting force responded to the call of fire a little after 6 p.m., by which time flames were coming through the roof of the church. The volunteers under the direction of Elmer Finney, attached hoses to hydrants and attempted to gain control of the fire. Word was sent to Greencastle Fire Department, which sent a pumper truck to the fire. Once it was determined that the church could not be saved, efforts were directed at saving the adjacent parsonage. Using an estimated thirty thousand gallons of water for the battle, the parsonage was saved, but the church, which had stood since 1873, was a total loss.

Another large fire event occurred in Cloverdale Township on October 30, 1944. Two thousand acres of woods burned in what local media called a forest fire. Again, the volunteer firefighting force was summoned but they could only bring buckets to fight the blaze. After a call to the State Farm, inmates were brought out with buckets and shovels to try and contain the blaze. Local farmers also assisted, and the fire was finally brought under control almost 24 hours after it began.

These fire events prompted the local volunteers to begin raising money to start a Cloveredale department. The men purchased an old engine with a front-mount pump and stored it in a single bay station with a dirt floor. The building, located on Market Street, is the site of the current fire station. Since Elmer Finney was the head of the volunteer fire force, he was named the first Fire Chief for the newly formed Fire Department. The department responded to calls in town and also assisted the township.

On December 17, 1951, a large fire broke out at the Langdon Poultry Dressing Plant in Cloverdale. The local volunteer fire department responded with their truck and did all they could to fight back the flames, but the fire had a big head start and the building was lost, along with over a thousand chickens, ducks, and turkeys. The volunteers directed their efforts toward saving the variety store and post office east of the poultry plant. With the help of personnel and a truck sent by the Greencastle Fire Department, the volunteers ensured that neither building suffered damage.

In August 1967 another large fire erupted in town. The fire began at 8 p.m. and resulted in a 24-hour firefight by the department, assisted by the Greencastle Fire Department. The blaze consumed part of Bill Cooper Auto Sales, the local laundromat, the Graphic newspaper office, a vehicle, and cable from the RTC Telephone Company. Fire Chief Robert Weist reported no injuries but the damage was estimated at $65,000.

Because the department only went to fire calls, runs were limited. When I-70 was completed, everything changed for the department: It was soon tasked with responding to fires and accidents that occurred along a high-speed interstate. The department adapted by adding two bays to their fire station as well as more trucks to their arsenal. The firemen began training in first aid and in rescue techniques that would assist them in responding to calls on highways.

By 1973 the department had purchased three pumper trucks and started doing open house events for the community, inviting people to come and see the equipment and meet the firefighters. Rescue and firefighting demonstrations were performed as well, so the public could see just what kinds of tasks their local department could perform. The force had grown to 24 members and the department was averaging around 100 calls a year. At that time, they covered calls from all of Cloverdale Township, all of Taylor Township in Owen County, and all of I-70 in Putnam County.

With the expanded duties, the department hoped to raise enough money to purchase a small truck or jeep to convert into a vehicle that would allow firefighters to effectively respond to off road fires. Chief Robert Young told the *Daily Banner* that the men knew fundraising would take time, but they hoped the open house events would jumpstart their efforts. The men also organized Pancake and Sausage Day. This event included a raffle, and all proceeds went to help the department purchase equipment. The men were able to get local farmers to donate the hogs for the event, providing much needed help with expenses. Held every April, this event has become a spring staple for the department.

During the 1990s the department continued to update their firefighting fleet. In 1991 a new fire engine was purchased from Pierce. The truck, which held 1000 gallons of water and could pump 1250 gpm, was painted yellow, the department's traditional color for these vehicles. The Pierce pumper tanker that holds 3000 gallons of water, has a 1500 gpm pump, and carries five firefighters is still in service today. Entering the 21st century, the department was averaging around 500 calls per year. They added all of Warren Township in Putnam County to their response area and provided mutual aid to departments in Putnam, Owen, and Morgan Counties. However, things were about to take a dramatic turn.

In 2004, because the Town of Cloverdale decided that the services of the Cloverdale Township were no longer needed, and wanted to form their own department, the Cloverdale Township VFD was forced to find a new station and move all their trucks and equipment; the town took over the existing fire station. Subsequently, the department moved their operations to a donated building located off Stardust Road. It was still responsible for fire protection of Warren, Taylor, and Cloverdale Townships, but they were advised to stay out of the Town of Cloverdale unless their help was requested.

The Town of Cloverdale purchased some used fire trucks from South Bend, Indiana, and contracted medical services with CARE Ambulance Corporation, who put a truck and crew at the Cloverdale fire station. The newly formed department lasted a year and a few months before the Town once again contracted with the Cloverdale Township VFD and allowed them to move back into their old fire station. However, the short-lived Town of Cloverdale department did respond to a major blaze on November 5, 2003. A structure fire was reported at Rick’s Steakhouse located at 5 South Main Street. Arriving fire department members quickly determined they needed help and summoned several area departments to assist. The restaurant was next to the Summerfield nursing facility and the fire forced the evacuation of those residents. Putnam, Owen, and Morgan County fire departments worked for several hours to extinguish the blaze.

Another large fire occurred in Warren Township in April of 2007. An estimated 88 firefighters from 15 fire departments battled a structure fire at the Torr’s Restaurant located at the intersection of U.S. 231 and Highway 40.

As call volumes continued to increase for the department, more space was needed to house all the equipment, so members constructed a 4300-square foot addition on the north side of the fire station in 2009. The addition was built to house two 40-foot District 7 response trailers, several ATVs and trailers, the department’s boat and trailer, and other miscellaneous equipment.

The department has faced many challenging calls since their inception in 1949, but calls along I-70 continue to increase in number and severity and at times, present quite a challenge. On February 14, 2016, a quick snow squall caused a 54-car pile-up on I-70 east of Cloverdale at the 46-mile marker. This crash preceded another pile up of cars around the 30-mile marker west of Cloverdale. Thankfully there were no major injuries, but responders were kept busy for several hours checking vehicles and assisting wrecker crews in removing the wreckage and cleaning up spilled liquids. On December 29, 2019, another major incident occurred at the 38-mile marker. As Cloverdale crews were working another incident, a car rear-ended their fire truck, which was parked in the passing lanes blocking traffic. A passenger in the car was killed in the accident and Engine 77 was totaled.

CTVFD has grown considerably since its humble beginnings. The current fleet of trucks consists of three engines, a tanker, rescue and medical response vehicles, a grass truck, several support trailers, and ATVs. With a current roster of 30 members and averaging almost 800 runs per year, this all-volunteer department still defies the odds of keeping up with the demands of an enormous call volume and continuous training and meetings.